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# Doc's Orders

**Turns out, red meat is just what the doctor ordered.**

by **Brooke Roberts**

**D**o you ever wonder how beef came to be known as “what’s for dinner”? Make no mistake; that reputation was earned. Decades of insufficient research and misinformation tarnished the role of red meat in a healthy diet and led health professionals to avoid advising patients to

consume red meat. In fact, some bias against red meat still lingers amongst society. Thanks to a better understanding of the long-term benefits of eating red meat and the improved communication of beef’s nutritional qualities, beef has “steaked” its claim as a top protein source amongst consumers and health professionals alike.

## Shifting perspective

Every day doctors and dietitians across the country advise Americans in regard to their diets, health and well-being. But few doctors understand beef from pasture to plate better than Dr. Steve Merry, a cardiologist at Aurora Health and owner of MGM Polled Herefords in Hartford, Wis.



**Dr. Steve Merry**

The son of a veterinarian and a nurse, it was only natural for Merry to pursue a career in the medical field. But after he completed his cardiology fellowship, his roots pulled him back into the Hereford business with his parents, Marion and Gordon Merry. The legacy of Merry’s late parents lives on in the 50 head of cows carrying the MGM prefix and in their son’s medical career.

In his 41 years practicing cardiology, Merry has witnessed the reputation of red meat struggle through the ill-informed 1970s and now progressively gain favor amidst positive research results, the popularity of the Atkins diet and an increasing emphasis on protein in healthy diets.

“I remember as a medical student, back in the ’70s, there was a lot of emphasis on LDLs [low-density lipoproteins] and bad cholesterol,” Merry says. “Because meat is high in saturated fats, doctors and dietitians tended to recommend avoiding red meat in order to lower your bad cholesterol. What was not done then is research related to outcomes — the outcome difference between people who eat red meat and people who do not.”

Continued research has played a key role in changing opinions regarding red meat. Merry says a detailed analysis<sup>1</sup> of multiple studies comparing red meat eaters to those who did not consume red meat found those who consumed red meat did not suffer more strokes, did not have more heart disease or diabetes, and showed no difference in how long they lived relative to those who did not consume red meat.

Since then, studies have continued to evolve and to provide further clarity.

“The studies that came out about 10 years ago were relatively neutral, saying those who eat red meat would not have any more problems than anyone else,” Merry explains. “But now the studies<sup>2</sup> are actually revealing that if you eat more unprocessed red meat, you live longer and have less strokes.”

Along with continued research, Merry credits the Atkins diet for playing a role in popularizing the consumption of red meat in a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet. The diet served as the first major consumer-facing public statement advocating for red meat. But personal opinions regarding diet are difficult to shift, and debunking decades of anti-red meat sentiment is a tedious process.

“People are slow to change,” Merry says. “They have their ideas and are slow to accept change or new ideas.”

For that reason, he believes educating consumers is crucial to changing the narrative. But, as a doctor, he recognizes facts need to reach individuals well in advance of his interactions with them as patients.

“We need to get the message to young people and families long before they become patients. You don’t find doctors talking to patients very much about diet,” Merry explains. “What ultimately happens is a referral to a dietitian. The dietitians are the ones who more often connect with the people.”



**Sarah Agena**

### **Making the connection**

Registered dietitian (RD) Sarah Agena spends every day doing just that — helping people establish healthy diets and develop informed eating habits.

“I talk about the nutritional benefits of beef,” Agena explains. “In a three- to four-ounce serving of beef, you get about 25 grams of protein for only about 150 calories. Beef, and other good protein sources, help people feel fuller for longer with less calories.”

A collegiate swimmer with a master’s degree in exercise science, Agena knows firsthand how consuming the right foods can affect performance.

“As a student athlete, I was always conscious about what I ate and how it fueled my performance,” she says. “Including protein after exercise or an athletic event helps with muscle



recovery, as animal proteins contain essential amino acids we cannot produce ourselves.”

For the last six years, Agena has interacted with patients, fellow dietitians and other health professionals in her role as the consulting dietitian for the Wisconsin Beef Council. During that time, she feels health professionals have become increasingly more receptive to incorporating red meat on a healthy plate.

“Research<sup>3</sup> has concluded it is okay to include healthy fats like lean beef in a heart-healthy diet,” she says. “Unfortunately, society is constantly bombarded with the latest and greatest way to lose weight on social media. A lot of times this is not information that is supported by research or suggested by a health professional like a physician or RD.”

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<sup>1</sup> Red and Processed Meat Consumption and Risk of Incident Coronary Heart Disease, Stroke, and Diabetes Mellitus; *Circulation* 2010; 121: 2271-2283.

<sup>2</sup> Association of fats and carbohydrate intake with cardiovascular disease and mortality in 18 countries from five continents (PURE): A prospective cohort study; *Lancet* 2017; 390:2050-2062.

<sup>3</sup> Roussel MA, et al. Beef in an Optimal Lean Diet study: effects on lipids, lipoproteins, and apolipoproteins. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2012;95:9-16.

## Heart-healthy choices

Eating healthy does not have to be difficult or unpleasant! For your next heart-healthy meal, choose from any of these nine extra-lean beef cuts certified by the American Heart Association's® Heart-Check program:



-  **Extra Lean Ground Beef**  
(96% lean, 4% fat)
-  **Bottom Round Steak**
-  **Extra Lean Ground Beef** (96% lean, 4% fat,  
with natural flavors)
-  **Sirloin Tip Steak**
-  **Top Sirloin Petite Roast, Boneless**
-  **Top Sirloin Strips**
-  **Top Sirloin Filet**
-  **Top Sirloin Kabob**
-  **Top Sirloin Steak, Boneless, Center Cut** **HW**

**Editor's note:** Find out more at [BeeftsWhatsForDinner.com/nutrition/beef-and-heart-health](https://www.BeeftsWhatsForDinner.com/nutrition/beef-and-heart-health).



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More recently, people are curious about how plant-based proteins and meat alternatives compare to beef. In the dietitian's mind, there is no comparison.

"Beef is beef — one ingredient," Agena says. "Plant-based proteins contain about 20 ingredients and are higher in calories and sodium. In my opinion, these new plant-based proteins are certainly not turning meat eaters into plant-based eaters."

The nutritional aspects of beef continue to drive sales and to earn the protein its rightful place on dinner tables across America.

### Keeping beef top of mind

Demand for beef is crucial to the livelihoods of cattlemen and women nationwide. Agena is one of many state beef council staff members across the country who promotes consumer demand for beef through local promotion efforts, often extending messages from the national "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." brand, which is funded by the Beef Checkoff program.

The producer-funded Beef Checkoff partners with the American Heart Association (AHA) to certify beef products with the AHA Heart-Check mark logo on food packages and to help health-conscious consumers identify foods that meet criteria for saturated fat and cholesterol. Through this same partnership, heart-healthy beef recipes are created for the AHA Recipe Certification Program.

Whether it's "Beef. It's What's for Dinner." reaching consumers via social media and digital advertising, state beef council staff members sharing beef's nutritional qualities, or consumers choosing an AHA Heart Check-certified beef cut at the grocery store, the Beef Checkoff is actively involved in educating consumers about beef's positive role in health. These efforts help to inform people who may never interact or discuss their dietary choices with a health professional like a registered dietitian or a cardiologist.

Research, education and communication continue to pave the way for consumer consumption of beef. Ask the cardiologist and cattleman about the future of beef, and you will find the same optimism of the student-athlete turned dietitian.

"I think the consumption of red meat will continue to grow," Agena says. "People are more open to including beef in a well-balanced diet and continue to realize beef is not only an excellent source of protein, but also tastes delicious." **HW**

## Delicious and nutritious

Many popular beef cuts already fit the criteria of a healthy and lean cut. According to the “Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner.” brand, a sign a cut is lean is if the word “round” or “loin” is part of the name. With improved genetics, feeding and trimming practices, more than 60% of whole muscle beef cuts commonly sold in retail stores are considered lean when cooked with visible fat trimmed.

Here are some of the most popular lean options from “Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner.” Find out more at [BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com/nutrition/lean-beef](http://BeefItsWhatsForDinner.com/nutrition/lean-beef).

### TOP SIRLOIN STEAK (TOP LOIN STEAK)

Known as: Boneless Sirloin Butt Steak; Boneless Top Sirloin Steak; Loin, Top Sirloin Butt Steak, Boneless; Sirloin Butt Steak; Top Sirloin Butt Center-Cut Steak; Top Sirloin Butt Steak, Boneless; Top Sirloin Steak Boneless Cap Off; Top Sirloin Steak Cap Off

A flavorful cut that is versatile and juicy. Great served as a steak or cut into kabobs.



### STRIP STEAK (TOP LOIN STEAK)

Known as: Ambassador Steak; Beef Loin, Strip Loin Steak, Bone In, Center-Cut; Club Steak; Country Club Steak; Delmonico Steak; Hotel Cut Steak; Kansas City Steak; Kansas City Strip Steak; New York Strip Steak; NY Strip Steak; Shell Steak; Strip Loin Steak; Top Loin Steak; Top Loin Steak, Bone-In

Tender, lean and perfect for grilling.



### TENDERLOIN STEAK (FILET MIGNON)

Known as: Beef Loin, Tenderloin Steak, Side Muscle Off, Skinned; Beef Tender Steak; Butt Tenderloin; Chateaubriand; Chateaubriand Filet De Boeuf; Filet De Boeuf; Filet Mignon; Filet Steak; Fillet de Boeuf; Fillet Steak; Medallions; Short Tenderloin; Tenderloin Medallion; Tenderloin Steak, Side Muscle Off, Skinned

This is the most tender steak, lean yet succulent, with a fine buttery texture. Sold boneless. This steak also meets government guidelines for lean.



### 95% LEAN GROUND BEEF

Known as: Ground Chuck; Ground Round; Ground Sirloin; Ground Steak

Versatility and rich flavor make it ideal for burgers, tacos or wraps. Perfect for breakfast, lunch and everything in between. **HW**



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